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SUBJECT: IRAQ: TURKISH OFFICIAL, PARLIAMENTARY AND NGO  
REACTIONS TO ABU GHRAIB ABUSE

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Summary  
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1. (SBU) While Turkish officials have not complained to us about the torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners, the Turkish press, Parliament and NGO community are vocally expressing their disgust with the news. Several groups have peacefully demonstrated in front of the US and UK Embassies in Ankara. A Turkish NGO has called for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Iraq of occupation forces. The Deputy Chairman of the Constitutional Court has decided not to attend this year's US Independence Day celebration (on May 26), citing "the latest disgusting developments that happened in Iraq." One AK Party deputy has called for President Bush and PM Blair to be tried as war criminals, and the Chairman of the Turkish Parliamentarians' Union called the "violent policy of the US...one of the biggest threats facing humanity." Despite being nearly one week old, the story has not yet shown signs of fading here in Turkey. End Summary.

2. (SBU) In the only official conversation we have had on the torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib, the Ambassador on May 6 told Ali Bardakoglu, President of the Religious Affairs Directorate, that this was a stain on our nation's honor. Bardakoglu replied that he had been at a conference in Cairo last week on tolerance in Islamic civilization and had wanted to talk about tolerance, but this was difficult because of the Iraq incidents, which he said had, along with the situation in Iraq in general, "opened a wound" in the Arab world, and a split with the West. FM Gul told the press May 4, "this is really very shameful. Without a doubt, this will be difficult to forget. The good thing is that investigations were initiated in both countries and that those who were responsible will be punished. This is not being hidden. That is more important. It is a blessing of democracy and freedom that they disclose such things in their own country. We are conveying our concerns and uneasiness at every level about these issues."

3. (SBU) Despite Turkish officials refraining from directly confronting us about the stories of torture and abuse by US and UK soldiers in Iraq, the issue has dominated the Turkish press every day since the story broke, with papers calling the abuse "systematic," saying "there is no end to the detestable abuses at Abu Ghraib," and that torture was "incredible and inhuman." The May 7 edition of Milliyet reported that the existence of more than 1000 photos of the abuse demonstrated that US officials had ordered the recording of the abuses. See SEPTEL for more on Turkish press coverage. There have been several peaceful demonstrations in front of the US and UK Embassies over the past several days by young Turks protesting the recent developments in Iraq.

4. (U) The Parliament's Human Rights Commission released a statement on May 6 that said, "that we are faced once again with such practices by those who label themselves apostles of civilization shows us that their real intention is not to bring freedom...The invaders who failed to prove the existence of weapons of mass destruction...have sowed the seeds of hatred in our region that are very hard to forget...the perpetrators should face trial at the International Criminal Court and the victims should be compensated." Commission Chairman Mehmet Elkatmis called the incidents "crimes against humanity." A separate but similar press release was issued by another group of 196 members of the Turkish Parliament.

5. (U) AK Party deputy Abdullah Caliskan released a written

statement May 6 asserting that "the inhumane treatment was ordered by state officials in an organized way. Therefore, Bush and Blair should face trial together with the 'psycho' soldiers." Turkish Parliamentarians' Union Chairman Zeki Celiker described the "violent policy of the United States" as "one of the biggest threats facing humanity."

16. (U) The Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed Peoples, a Turkish NGO, issued a statement May 6 that received wide media coverage. The text of the statement said that, "The torture and maltreatment applied by the US and UK forces to Iraqi civilians and POWs has reached a disgusting and shameful level...In the last week hundreds of Iraqi civilians were killed in Fallujah. Witnesses stated that the streets were full of dead bodies. Thousands of civilians are being detained by force in order for soldiers to collect information about the Iraqi resistance...They are being subjected to torture. Occupation forces are violating all universal humanitarian norms. They are committing crimes against humanity under Article 13 of the UN Geneva Convention...The only party responsible for the inhuman actions taking place in Iraq is the occupation force...We call on the UN and other international organizations to launch an impartial investigation...We seek permission for independent human rights experts to visit Iraq in order to investigate the ongoing human rights violations. Finally, we want the occupation forces to leave Iraq immediately and unconditionally."

17. (SBU) The Embassy was contacted May 7 by the office of the Constitutional Court's Deputy Chairman to say he would not attend this year's US Independence Day celebration (being held at the end of May to avoid conflicting with the President's visit for the NATO Istanbul Summit) because of "the latest disgusting developments in Iraq." We anticipate that other invitees may also decline to attend in protest. Despite almost a week having passed since the story first broke, the clamor over it in Turkey has not yet begun to fade.

18. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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